

HISTORY STAFF PROGRAM

Executive Summary

1. Goals: To serve CIA by helping preserve its institutional memory and historical records, by providing a specialized reference service, and by writing its history.
2. Products: Classified histories for use by CIA managers and other Agency employees. The new program will build on, but differ from, a previous program that produced mainly component histories by writers assigned from the offices or divisions. We intend to use professionally trained historians to research and write Agency history at a level of generality that will minimize reference to sources and methods, and in a governmental context that will reveal the Agency's place in the conduct of United States policy. We propose four categories of histories:
 - A. a short survey history of the Agency
 - B. studies of the leadership of the individual DCIs
 - C. a series of topical monographs
 - D. a multi-volume general history of CIA

We have attached prospectuses for the short survey history and for a Raborn period general history volume.

3. Other activities: The History Staff is CIA's point of contact with other U.S. government history programs that use CIA-originated documents. It also provides an internal reference service on matters of a historical nature, and proposes to conduct an oral history program in conjunction with its other research.
4. Staffing: The History Staff currently consists of a Chief, Deputy Chief, and two support personnel. Two additional historians are being recruited. Each of the staff historians will undertake one writing project--ranging in duration from six months to several years--at a time.

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HISTORY STAFF PROGRAM

I shall not begin with a long argument for the utility of historical studies for CIA, because I think that this is self-evident. The CIA cannot plan or act without being influenced by its historical experience. It is therefore not a question of whether the Agency uses history, but rather of what kind of history it uses, and how well. "History is simply recorded memory," a distinguished historian has written. "People without memory are mentally sick. So too are nations or societies or institutions that reject or deny the relevance of their collective past."

In this paper I shall propose a program for the CIA History Staff, which was re-established in November 1980, and which I joined as Chief Historian in August 1981. Since the History Staff's work will call for support from all parts of the Agency, we need the Executive Committee's approval and suggestions before we embark on a new program.

With this program the History Staff expects to serve the Agency in three ways: by helping to preserve its institutional memory and historical records; by providing a specialized reference service for it and other government agencies; and, most importantly, by writing its history. The histories we shall write fall into four main categories:

- A. a short survey history of the Agency
- B. studies of the leadership of the individual DCIs
- C. a series of topical monographs
- D. a multi-volume general history of CIA.

After a brief account of the History Staff's development 1952-1979 and of its restoration in the past year, this paper will explain how the History Staff plans to carry out its records and reference functions, and how it will organize its four history-writing projects.

Background

Since Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith appointed Dr. Arthur Darling as CIA's first historian in 1952 the role and size of the History Staff have varied greatly. Until the late 1960s the office remained small, and professional historians produced well-written and carefully documented studies of the origins and early years of the Agency, and of

the development of its organizational structure. In 1968, however, on the initiative of Col. L.K. White, then Executive Director/Comptroller, a large staff of over 20 was organized to supervise an ambitious program of "component histories," which eventually involved hundreds of people throughout the Agency. After 352 of these monographs--of the much larger number originally projected--had been written, this program was abruptly halted and the History Staff cut back sharply at the end of the 1973 fiscal year. By mid-1974, when only one historian and two support staff remained, they were transferred from the Office of the DCI to DDA. By the end of 1979 this vestigial History Staff had been dissolved altogether.

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In 1979, even as the History Staff expired, new studies were under way to determine what kind of history program CIA needed. By mid-1980 the DCI decided to re-establish a history office on a new and more solid footing. Based on the advice of an internal History Advisory Committee, chaired by [] and of an eminent outside historian, [] the Agency in October 1980 began the search for a new Chief Historian. Shortly thereafter a History Staff was set up in the Office of the DCI with [] history Ph.D. from NFAC, as Acting Chief and permanent Deputy.

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The History Staff, which is housed in the Ames Building, has in addition to its Chief and Deputy, one History Assistant (GS-9), and one Secretary (GS-6). Its T/O authorizes two additional Historians (GS-13), whom we are now trying to recruit. Dr. Jack Pfeiffer, Chief Historian 1974-79, has also been assigned to this office for the current year, to complete his history of the Bay of Pigs operation.

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[] report of June 1980 and [] of July 1980 both generally agreed on how a new History Staff should be set up, and the Agency has fairly closely followed these reports' suggestions in restoring the History Staff. Both reports also agreed that a comprehensive program should not be organized until a new Chief Historian had taken charge, and this suggestion has given impetus since August to the inquiries and consultations needed to plan a new program. I have looked into the work of the History Staff before its demise in 1979 and consulted with people who were associated with it then. I have talked at least briefly with the DCI, DDCI and all the Deputy Directors (except Mr. Dirks), and others in the Agency about the direction that a new program should take. Outside of the Agency I have had especially useful discussions with the Chief Historians of the Department of State, the National Security Agency, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the four military services.

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These inquiries were aimed at identifying not only the most useful purposes that a CIA History Staff can serve, but also the

principal problems that we can expect to face in pursuing these objectives. Writing history for the Central Intelligence Agency is not like writing history for any other organization. The benefits of an accurate record and systematic historical analysis must be kept in constant balance with the requirements of security. The measures necessary to protect secret information and the sources and methods used to obtain it, must be rigorously observed as the History Staff carries out its several functions.

Program

The History Staff has three principal functions, which center around records, reference and writing. Since the writing of history is the most prominent of these, let us first deal briefly with records and reference.

Records and Reference

The records of the CIA are the raw material needed both to provide a useful reference service and to write accurate and systematic history. Although the History Staff maintains some records of its own--mainly the histories and monographs already produced, and some of the documents and reference files to support past and future studies--its role with respect to the Agency's records is essentially advisory. The DDA runs an efficient records management system, which follows general guidance from the National Archives and Records Service on what records to preserve. Our function is to complement the administrative and managerial criteria used in collecting records with our professional advice as CIA historians, to see that important historical documentation is not lost. We also plan to improve the History Staff's ability to offer informed advice on what to preserve of the important new kinds of audio, visual and computer records. In the 1970s the History Staff made a small beginning in an oral history program, and we now hope to do much more. By capturing the institutional memory of that rapidly retiring first generation of CIA officers, an oral history program can provide an invaluable resource for writing the Agency's history. We therefore plan to organize a modest but systematic oral history interview program, especially as we press on with our projected general history and studies of the DCIs.

In dealing with the Agency's records the History Staff also responds to the requests from other Government offices (e.g. the Department of State and NSA historians' offices, and the Army's Center for Military History) for access to CIA documents. (DDA's IPD handles such requests from private researchers.) Agency-originated documents in the

several presidential libraries account for a large part of these official requests, and we act as broker in referring such documents to the Agency components who decide whether or not they can be released and declassified. This work is the most obvious and frequent in our liaison role with the historical profession in government, universities, learned societies and elsewhere.

The History Staff's reference service is at the intersection of its records and writing roles. To respond to Agency and outside official requests to find specific information or to review material for historical accuracy, we use essentially the same historical records and research skills that we use to write histories. For Agency-wide use the History Staff has published several classified chronologies and lists of key personnel that now need up-dating. The large file of component studies, which covers most aspects of the Agency's activities up to the mid-1960s, has been especially useful in answering a wide variety of internal requests for historical information to use in training and litigation, and to reveal how recurring problems have been handled in the past. We expect that our reference capability will be used more as the Agency becomes aware that we are in business again.

Histories

Clearly the History Staff's central function is to write history. As far as I can discover the only real controversy about this role has centered on the massive "component histories" program carried out from 1968 to 1973. It may be useful to look for a moment at this old program before presenting a new program of historical research and writing.

The component histories program was launched in 1968 as a "catch-up" program, to produce historical studies of virtually all of the Agency's activities, operations and components from its beginning to around 1965. Over 500 separate "histories" were projected, mostly to be done not by the History Staff, but by people in the components. Although the History Staff expanded substantially, it served mainly in a supervisory, editing and review role. Thus most of these studies were neither researched nor written by trained historians, but rather by officers detached from their regular duties for this work. The length of these studies ranges from a few pages to several volumes and their quality also varies enormously. Some are excellent; most are mediocre and pedestrian; some are very bad. Very few qualify as completed histories; they are narrowly focused preliminary studies designed principally to capture valuable data and experience that might otherwise have been lost. Intended for only limited circulation inside the

Agency, most exist in but one or two copies. They have proved highly useful for internal Agency reference purposes, and they will be important sources for later more professional and comprehensive historical studies. Yet they must be used with caution and discrimination. Mostly descriptive rather than analytical and often lacking context and perspective, they can be misleading. The faults in both design and execution of this "components histories" program became evident to everyone once some of these studies were released to the Senate Select Committee in the mid-1970s. I should therefore emphasize at the outset that we propose no studies along these lines in the program we shall outline here.

What I do propose is a writing program that will be both of obvious and immediate usefulness to the Agency, and within the capabilities of the professional historians allotted to this office. This program includes four principal projects:

- A. a short but comprehensive survey history of the Agency from its OSS origins to the recent past
- B. a continuation of the series of histories of the DCIs, which now ends with Allen Dulles's tenure
- C. a series of historical monographs on subjects of continuing interest and importance to the Agency
- D. a multi-volume general history of the Agency.

Let us look a little more closely at what will be involved in each of these projects.

A Short Survey History

For a long time the Agency has needed a readable and reliable survey of itself for its own people. What we now propose is a succinct classified one-volume history, to be widely available in the Agency for training, reference and critical perspective. A corporate history is essential for any profession, including the profession of intelligence. Members of CIA now have only outside histories--of wildly differing quality and accuracy--to turn to for an account of how the Agency got to where it is today. The only US government history of CIA is a brief unclassified annex to the Senate Select Committee hearings, published in 1976. There is no single work that any Agency employee, whether a new Career Trainee or a senior executive, can rely on for an accurate, authoritative and concise survey of the Agency's history since its origins in World War II. prospectus of what our survey

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history would cover, and of how it might be organized, is attached as Annex A.

DCI Histories

STAT In the History Staff's series of studies of the Directors of Central Intelligence two first-rate histories, each in five typescript volumes, have been completed, in 1971 and 1973. The first is on Walter Bedell Smith as DCI, by Ludwell Montague, and the second is on Allen Dulles as DCI, by [] Beyond this, Walter Elder has done some work on John McCone as DCI.

STAT We propose to continue this series. The present DCI has already enlisted the cooperation of Messrs. Schlesinger and Helms in this enterprise, and has arranged for two distinguished retired officers, [] and John Bross, to help them in organizing their recollections. These DCI histories, by emphasizing the impact of the man on the Agency, offer a unique view of CIA's work from the top.

Historical Monographs

Monographic studies will allow us to assure priority treatment of topics that we find of current importance to the Agency, and to pull together in one account the related efforts of a variety of components. Moreover, these studies will consider these topics in the larger context of the government as a whole. This kind of study would treat such topics as CIA's relations with Congress, its role in the intelligence community, its part in the development of overhead reconnaissance, and its work in the Vietnam War. Another example on a large scale is [] history of the Bay of Pigs operation, whose fourth and final volume is nearing completion. In the History Staff files there are also several excellent draft studies begun in the early 1970s that should now be completed. Good examples are two studies, by [] and John Bross, on forerunners of the intelligence community.

A General History

The largest long-term project in the new history program is the proposed multi-volume general history. We need to begin a history of the Agency as a whole, both to describe its development since 1947 and to draw the main themes of its evolution into a broad synthesis. While a general history of CIA will be periodized by the tenures of successive DCIs, it will not focus (as the DCI histories will) on these men and

their impact, but rather on the growth of the entire institution and on its role in the American policy process. This kind of history must be carefully documented, but we shall try to overcome that tendency towards encyclopedic fullness of detail that typifies so many institutional histories. By avoiding elaborate detail a general history can explain how the Agency has changed and progressed over the years, without using the kind of particularistic evidence that is most likely to raise questions of sensitive sources and methods. Any large and complex organization can profit from this kind of institutional history. When the need for historical perspective and accurate background data arises, it is a question of whether it is met by relying on whatever old documents are in the files and the longest memories available, or by referring to a comprehensive professional history of the institution. A strong and effective History Staff will relieve Agency components of having to act as their own historians. A precedent and starting point for our work is the two-volume general history of CIA's progenitor, OSS, that the War Department prepared (with Kermit Roosevelt as Chief Historian) at the end of World War II. To give an idea of what one could expect to be covered in this kind of general history, [] has written a sketch account of the volume (or part of a volume) that would treat Admiral Raborn's period as DCI. This prospectus, attached as Annex B, illustrates how this large work would put a wide range of apparently unrelated events and activities into the context of both the Agency and the government taken as a whole.

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Conclusions

STAT The program we have presented here will fully occupy the talents and efforts of the small History Staff. I should emphasize that we think it important that professionally trained historians write the projected histories. [] will undertake the survey volume and I shall start on the first of the DCI histories (probably the study of James Schlesinger as DCI). When the two new historians are in place we plan to put one to work on a volume in the general history (probably for the Raborn period), and to assign the other to the first study in the topical monograph series. As our history program evolves we may need to seek additional help in our research and writing projects. Should this be necessary, I would propose to arrange for qualified outside historians (good candidates might be Agency annuitants with historical training and experience) to undertake specific projects on fixed-term contracts.

I should also note that we need to build a network of interested and sympathetic officers in the upper echelons of the various directorates. The willingness of such people to broker arrangements in their components and serve on all-Agency boards to review completed manuscripts is essential to our work. As a formal base for such a network we hope to estab-

lish an internal History Advisory Board, with at least one senior representative from each directorate. Our work cannot prosper if we do not maintain open lines of communication with all parts of the Agency.

Having looked carefully at the history of the History Staff, I am confident that we can avoid the more obvious mistakes of the past. But this is not enough. Whether the new history program succeeds or fails will depend on how effectively it helps the Agency carry out its work and mission. With this in mind, we have tried to fashion a new program that will be useful, productive and worthy of your trust and support.

J. Kenneth McDonald

21 October 1981